

**OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY BOARD OF VISITORS  
ATHLETICS COMMITTEE  
June 15, 2023**

TO: Athletics Committee Members:  
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P. Murry Pitts (*ex-officio*)  
Yvonne T. Allmond  
Dennis Ellmer  
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Toykea Jones  
Elza H. Mitchum

FROM: Dr. Wood Selig  
Director of Athletics

DATE: June 8, 2023

SUBJECT: June 15, 2023 – Meeting Agenda

The Athletics Committee meeting will take place in the Board Room (Room 2206) of the Kate and John R. Broderick Dining Commons from 9:00AM – 10:00AM on Thursday, June 15, 2023.

The following items will be discussed:

- I. Approval of the December 8, 2022 Minutes
- II. Head Coach and Student-Athlete  
Mallory Kane, Head Coach Women's Golf  
Leah Onosato, Women's Golf Student-Athlete (2023 Sun Belt Conference Women's Individual Golf Champion)
- III. Mental Health Update – Year in Review  
Dr. Sonja Lund, Associate Athletics Director, Student-Athlete Mental Health and Wellness
- IV. Academic and Community Service Update (2022-2023)  
Amy Lynch, Director of Student-Athlete Services and Community Engagement
- V. Sun Belt Conference Success  
Dr. Camden Wood Selig, Director of Athletics

## TOP 25 SCHOOLS

1. UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
2. TULANE UNIVERSITY
3. TOWSON UNIVERSITY
4. GEORGIA TECH
5. UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
6. UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI
7. UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS RIO GRANDE VALLEY
8. PROVIDENCE COLLEGE
9. OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
10. WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
11. TROY UNIVERSITY
12. KENT STATE UNIVERSITY
13. BAYLOR UNIVERSITY
14. UNIVERSITY OF NORTH ALABAMA
15. GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY
16. UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA
17. COASTAL CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
18. BUCKNELL UNIVERSITY
19. BELMONT UNIVERSITY
20. WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY
21. STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY
22. SAN JOSE STATE
23. UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
24. UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA
25. JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

2022-2023



# Leah Onosato Overcame Obstacles to Make ODU History



April 25, 2023

## **By Harry Minium**

Fairy tales don't often happen in college athletics. The kindest person, the best student, the hardest worker, those who appear most deserving of success don't always win.

But Old Dominion women's golf coach Mallory Kane says she saw one play out at the Sun Belt Conference Championship in Florida, where Leah Onosato led from start to finish and became the Monarchs' first female golfer to win a conference championship.

"For her to accomplish this, it's totally a fairy tale," Kane said. "And the reason it's so special is because it doesn't normally happen. Sports can be cruel and especially golf, where you lose much more than you win. There's no one I could think of who's more

deserving."

A fifth-year graduate student, Onosato had a perfect 4.0 grade-point average in her undergraduate degree in English and has maintained the same while working on her master's in applied linguistics. She's been active in student activities, including ODU's Student-Athlete Advisory committee. And she was named ODU's Female Scholar-Athlete of the year.

She was nearly as impressive on the golf course her first three years. She qualified for the NCAA Tournament and was a second-team All-Conference USA pick in 2021.

But last season her game suddenly went into the tank. Why is a complicated issue. She began having depression issues during the pandemic and being an athlete, she was too proud to ask for help.

"Athletes are supposed to be tough," she said.

Losing almost a year of competition to the pandemic also set her game back, and as she continued to fare poorly last spring, her confidence broke.

"She completely lost her game," Kane said.



Leah Onosato finished with a three-day total of 212 to win the Sun Belt Conference tournament championship by two strokes. Photo Romeo T. Guzman/Sun Belt Conference

The low point came in last spring's Conference USA Tournament, where she had a three-day average of 83, and shot a 90 on what was a nightmarish second round. She finished in a three-way tie for 42<sup>nd</sup> place.

"It was hard to go out there and feel beaten after every tournament," she said. "I kept asking myself, 'Why am I playing this way? Why am I going out here if it hurts so much?'"

Kane noted that Onosato didn't have to return this season. "But there was no way I was going to quit," Onosato said.

Kane played a huge role in helping her regain her form. She had her sized for a new set of irons and urged her to reset her mindset. They spoke for hours in Kane's office at the Lamberts Point Golf Course, and she urged her to work hard over the summer.

Onosato returned to Japan and worked with her golf swing coach and had long talks with her parents.

"I tried to let go of a lot of expectations," she said. "I pretty much went back to the basics.

"I knew this was going to be my last year, my last shot, but I couldn't think of it that way. I was putting so much pressure on myself, and I had to stop. It was hard, very hard to do."

She also spent long days on the driving range and putting green.

"The saying in golf is the secret's in the dirt, meaning you've got to go dig it out on the range," Kane said. "And she did that totally on her own."

Additionally, she sought mental health counseling earlier this semester at ODU's athletic counseling center and said it helped her regain her confidence.

"I wish I'd done it sooner," she said. "One of my teammates helped me bring it up to coach (Kane) and that was a huge thing, being able to talk about it. Coach has supported me the whole time, and that meant a lot."

Onosato knew her efforts were paying off when she shot 210 over three rounds with an average score of 70 and finished fourth in the Paladin Invitational at Furman University in September. By the end of the season, she had trimmed four strokes off her 18-hole average this season from the previous season.

She led in the Sun Belt Championship by four strokes entering the last three holes but bogeyed two holes before finishing with a 15-foot par putt.

Because ODU teed off first, it was 90 minutes before she knew she was the champion. She was nervous while she waited, but said her father, Tomio, was far more nervous.

Though it was 4 a.m. in Japan when she finished, her dad was following the tournament online and texted that she should be ready for a playoff.

But that wasn't necessary. She finished with a three-day total of 212, two strokes ahead of Louisiana-Monroe's Chantal Duerlinger.

"I was finally able to call my dad and he woke my mom up to tell her that I'd won," she said.

"It was very, very nice having that moment. My teammates were rushing at me and congratulating me, and it was a hectic frenzy. Some people were crying, and I was almost crying.

"My dad was just super happy for me. He congratulated me, and said he's always believed in me. And he always has."

Onosato began playing golf at the behest of her father and by the time she was 8, she was hooked.

Her mother, Laura, is an American who moved to Japan with her parents when she was 9. Laura is the daughter of Russell and Sandra Board, Christian missionaries stationed in Japan but who travel all over Asia. Laura has home-schooled her four children.

Onosato hadn't really considered playing golf in America until she was 17 when she played at a tournament in San Diego and fared well.

"One of the people who took us there asked me if I was considering it and up to that point, I hadn't," she said.

She quickly found someone with connections in America who made inquiries to golf coaches and wound up visiting several Power 5 schools and ODU. She says she chose ODU because of its golf prowess and Kane.

Onosato was fluent in English when she arrived at ODU and quickly gravitated toward English as a major. "I really love languages," she said. And writing – penning poetry helped her when her game fell apart and she fell into a depression – is also a passion.

"She's never gotten anything lower than an A," Kane said. "Just imagine the perseverance it takes to do that. If she stays at ODU, she'll eventually own the English Department."

Onosato has at least one more tournament to play, in the NCAA regionals in early May. Once her postseason is done, she said she'll likely eschew a career in pro golf and move on with life.

"I love playing golf," said Onosato, who plans to stay in the United States. "But there are so many other things I can do and want to do."

She acknowledged she has yet to fully absorb the fact that she's a conference champion.

"It was such a long journey to get here, and it wasn't just me who got me here," she said. "There have been all of these people who supported me the whole way, who believed in me more than I believed in myself a lot of the time."

*Pictured above, Sun Belt Conference Commissioner Keith Gill congratulates Leah Onosato. Photo Romeo T. Guzman/Sun Belt Conference*